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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: OUTSIDERS BANNED FROM TIBETAN AREAS OF GANSU AND
QINGHAI FOLLOWING LHASA RIOTS; MONKS REPORT PHONE AND
TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

REF: BEIJING 1351

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey
Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a March 16-21 trip to Gansu and Qinghai Provinces to investigate Tibetan area unrest reports, EmbOffs encountered well-coordinated government efforts to prevent foreigners from traveling to Tibetan regions of both provinces. In Lanzhou, capital of Gansu, EmbOffs saw a heavy police presence at Northwest Minorities University, where Tibetan students had reportedly demonstrated. A travel agent in Xining, Qinghai, told EmbOffs that Tibetans in several communities in the Province were "rebellious" and that foreigners were thus barred from all Tibetan areas south of the Yellow River. Tibetan residents of northeast Qinghai Province seemed well informed about the March 14 unrest in Lhasa thanks mainly to phone calls from friends and relatives in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Monks at two monasteries in Qinghai Province reported disruptions in their cell phone service and tight restrictions on travel. Some monks complained that they were being subject to daily political education meetings. After being turned back at road blocks outside of Lanzhou (Gansu) and Tongren (Qinghai), EmbOffs were stopped by police (who briefly detained our driver) in Gonghe, Qinghai. An official from the Qinghai Foreign Affairs office then requested EmbOffs leave Qinghai Province immediately. EmbOffs returned to Beijing the following day as planned and without incident. End summary.

Gansu: Roadblocks Move North

¶2. (C) EmbOffs arrived in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, March 16, intent on investigating the situation in Tibetan areas of the Province in the wake of unrest in the TAR and other Tibetan regions of China. Several cab drivers told PolOff that police had blocked off Tibetan areas, particularly the town of Xiahe near the Labrang Monastery, to all foreign visitors. One driver, surnamed Tang, told EmbOffs that Tibetans in Xiahe had engaged in rioting and looting. Tang said he attempted to take a group of foreign journalists to Xiahe March 15 but was turned back outside the town. Another driver, Liu Kexiong (protect), told EmbOffs that a small group of foreign journalists had managed to sneak into Xiahe late at night on March 15. After that, Liu said, police checkpoints became much tighter and were staffed 24 hours. On March 17, EmbOffs proceeded to Lanzhou's South Bus Station to check the availability of tickets to Tibetan areas. A ticket seller told PolOff that all tickets to Xiahe and Hezuo, another majority-Tibetan town in southern

Gansu, were sold out indefinitely. It was clear that "sold out" only applied to foreigners as PolOff witnessed several locals purchase tickets to these cities.

Heavy Police Presence at NW Minorities University

13. (C) EmbOffs visited the Lanzhou campus of Northwest Minorities University after hearing reports of protests there. The campus was quiet, though there were several Public Security Bureau (PSB) vehicles parked just outside the campus gates. Upon nearing the school's athletic field, EmbOffs were stopped by uniformed PSB officers and told to wait on the side of the field. EmbOffs noticed approximately one dozen plain clothes police/security officers near the field. Also near the field was a large trash bin filled with burnt candles and water bottles that had been used as make-shift candle holders. Officers refused to answer PolOff's question about the candles. (Note: Tibetan students at some of China's minority universities, including the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing, held candlelight vigils in the days following the Lhasa unrest.) An official from the university's Foreign Affairs Office then appeared and gave EmbOffs a "tour of the campus" that led us away from the athletic field and the police.

"Police Activity Ahead"

14. (C) Later March 17, EmbOffs attempted to travel to Xiahe and Hezuo by car but encountered a police

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checkpoint at a freeway toll booth approximately 40 miles south of Lanzhou. Upon flagging down EmbOff's car, an English-speaking PSB officer at the checkpoint asked EmbOffs for their journalists' credentials. A second PSB officer filmed EmbOffs during the entire encounter. The checkpoint was also manned by an official from the Gansu Provincial Foreign Affairs Office. After learning that EmbOffs were diplomats, not journalists, the PSB officers told EmbOffs that areas south of the checkpoint were closed due to "police activity" and EmbOffs would need to return to Lanzhou.

Phone and Travel Restrictions for Monks

15. (C) EmbOffs proceeded to Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province, and on March 18 visited the Kumbum (Ta Er Si) Monastery in Huangzhong, about a 40-minute drive south of Xining. At Kumbum a (half-Tibetan, half-Han) tour guide surnamed Yan told PolOff that no protests had taken place in or around Kumbum but authorities had imposed telephone and travel controls on the monks. (Note: Officially Kumbum houses 400 monks, though a local contact told us in February that the monastery houses an additional 300 unregistered monks.) Yan indicated that news of the Lhasa "rebellion" was public knowledge in the area. PolOff asked to be taken to a temple at Kumbum where a single photo of the Dalai Lama had been on display in February (reftel). Yan, however, refused, saying the temple had been "closed." EmbOffs then spoke with several monks in the town of Huangzhong. One monk, named Laxi (strictly protect), confirmed that monks were having difficulty calling on their cell phones and that travel was similarly "inconvenient." A second monk told PolOff that there had been protests in many Tibetan areas of Qinghai Province, especially in Yushu, a town close to the Qinghai-TAR border.

¶6. (C) Later on March 18, EmbOffs visited a China International Travel Service office in Xining and spoke with travel agent Qi Junping (protect). Qi said that all Chinese tour groups to Tibetan regions of Qinghai had been cancelled. Using EmbOffs' map, Qi pointed to several Tibetan areas of Qinghai that had experienced unrest, including the town of Tongren, Wutun Monastery, Fengwu Monastery and the town of Guinan, and the nearby Lucang Monastery. Qi added that since March 14 foreigners had been barred from all areas of Qinghai south of the Yellow River. At this point, Qi's boss shouted from across the office that Qi should not be giving such details to EmbOffs and that outbreaks of unrest were "not our business." Qi then told EmbOffs that she could not make travel arrangements for us until we obtained permission to travel to Tibetan regions from the Qinghai Public Security Bureau.

"Things Are Hard for Tibetans"

¶7. (C) EmbOffs spoke March 18 with Tsering Wencheng (strictly protect), a Tibetan hotel worker in Xining. Tsering Wencheng said that about 60 students at the

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Qinghai Normal University attempted to organize a demonstration that day but were stopped by school authorities. He said that "things are hard for Tibetans" in China and that Tibetan youths like himself have a difficult time finding good jobs. He said that despite the drumbeat of official propaganda blaming the Dalai Lama for instigating riots in Tibetan regions, most Tibetans do not believe the unrest is the Dalai Lama's fault.

¶8. (C) The following day, March 19, PolOff spoke with monks at the Wendu Monastery south of Xunhua (near the birthplace of the 10th Panchen Lama), about 60 miles southeast of Xining and the Qutan Monastery in Ledu County, approximately 40 miles west of Xining. Wendu, which we visited in the late morning, was nearly abandoned save for a group of about a dozen high school-aged monks. PolOff saw only one adult monk, who said the monasteries 300 monks were all in "neighboring villages reading scripture." (Note: "Reading scripture" may have been a reference to required attendance at political education meetings.) The monk said he had heard of the Lhasa riots on

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television and also had news of unrest in the Tibetan town of Tongren immediately to the south.

¶9. (C) At Qutan monastery, which we reached in the late afternoon, monk Souba Tuojie (strictly protect) complained that since the outbreak of the March 14 unrest in Lhasa, Qutan's 14 monks had been subjected to daily political study sessions run by the local township government. The monks are unable to leave the monastery, he said, and any monk failing to show up for the daily political meeting would be punished. Suoba Tuojie said monks at Qutan have never been able to display photos of the Dalai Lama even before March ¶14. A second Qutan monk, Gashang Shaoma (strictly protect), told PolOff he had heard about events in Lhasa via phone calls from friends but subsequently was unable to get through to them. Aside from the daily meetings, things had been quiet in Qutan and none of the monks had participated in any demonstrations, he said.

¶10. (C) EmbOffs attempted to visit several Tibetan towns in Qinghai March 19-20 but encountered roadblocks soon after entering majority Tibetan areas. On March 19, EmbOffs hired a car and attempted to reach the Tibetan town of Tongren (80 miles southeast of Xining near the Qinghai-Gansu border), where several local contacts told us protests had occurred. Just outside of Tongren, EmbOffs encountered a roadblock manned by local PSB officers. The police did not ask to see EmbOffs' documentation but simply said that Tongren was off-limits to outsiders. They indicated these controls applied to Chinese as well as to foreigners. The same officers said roadblocks were in place to prevent travelers from crossing into Gansu Province to Xiahe.

"Please Leave Qinghai Province"

¶11. (C) On March 20, EmbOffs headed southwest with the goal of reaching the Tibetan town of Guinan, 90 miles southwest of Xining. EmbOff's driver had successfully taken a foreign visitor to Guinan on March 15. The driver said he had heard that up to 300 monks at Guinan's Lucang Monastery had since held a demonstration. Upon leaving the town of Gonghe, about halfway to Guinan, EmbOffs were stopped at another roadblock. Gonghe PSB officers took our driver's vehicle registration and requested that we accompany them to the local PSB headquarters, where the driver and EmbOffs were asked to sit in a public waiting area. A PSB officer requested to see EmbOff's passports, which she proceeded to photocopy. (Note: At no point were we told we were not free to leave. EmbOffs were allowed to use our cell phones without restrictions. Our driver, however, was unable to leave since the PSB continued to hold his vehicle registration documents. This, given the lack of other transportation options and the isolated location, effectively prevented EmbOffs from leaving on our own.)

¶12. (C) After about 45 minutes, Li Yong, the Deputy Director of the Qinghai Foreign Affairs Office Protocol and Information Division (along with several other officials who did not identify themselves) appeared and told EmbOffs that our presence in Qinghai "violated U.S.-China diplomatic and consular agreements" which, he claimed, require the Embassy to notify local FAO offices of any official travel. Li then requested that EmbOffs leave Qinghai immediately. EmbOffs agreed to return to Xining and make arrangements for onward travel according to existing plans. EmbOffs also requested that our driver's vehicle registration be returned. (Note: Several officials then took our driver aside. The driver later told us that the officials said they would keep his registration and that he would be subject to a fine but that the driver was not supposed to reveal this information to EmbOffs. Several days later, the driver called PolOff to report that he had been fined RMB 3,000 (USD 428).) EmbOffs returned to Xining in our driver's vehicle but were closely followed by Li and the other officials. Upon arrival in Xining, EmbOffs took a taxi to a local hotel, where security forces closely watched EmbOffs. A plain clothes officer followed EmbOffs when we ventured outside the

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hotel. EmbOffs departed Xining by air the following day without incident.

¶13. (C) Both in Gansu and Qinghai, EmbOffs witnessed a

well coordinated effort to prevent foreigners from traveling to Tibetan areas. A driver in Lanzhou told us that all hotels, cab companies, bus stations and travel agencies had been informed of the policy banning foreigners. In Gansu, the one roadblock we encountered appeared to specifically target foreign journalists. In Qinghai, however, roadblocks appeared designed to intercept all unwanted/unauthorized travelers whether Chinese or foreign citizens. In the immediate aftermath of the March 14 Lhasa riots, Gansu and Qinghai authorities appear to have haphazardly closed off specific towns. As the week progressed, however, these choke points migrated further north, with gradually more and more Tibetan towns becoming off-limits to outsiders.

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